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ABSTRACT

Since the 1950's the Ford Foundation has spent some $36 million trying to promote a closer link-up between American universities and the problems of American cities. This document reviews the foundation's experience and some of the lessons from it and speculates about the future. Since the foundation has not yet fully evaluated the results of this major granting effort, the report is based on personal experience. Sections covered in the report include goals of the foundation, the urban extension (funding of urban experiments in physical planning or city government), economic factors, research, and service. (Author/PG)

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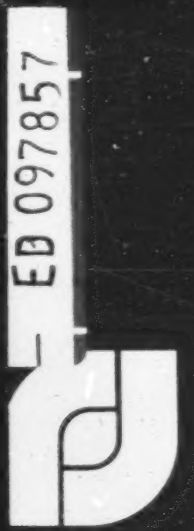

Urban Studies and the University–the Ford Foundation Experience

By William C. Pendleton

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Mr. Pendleton is a program officer in the office of Urban and Metropolitan Development at the Ford Foundation. The following is adapted from an address delivered at the New Orleans Regional Conference of the Office of Urban Affairs, American Council on Education, April 5, 1974.

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Since the 1950s, the Ford Foundation has spent some $36 million trying to promote a closer link-up between American universities and the problems of American cities. In light of the explosive growth of urban-oriented activities in American colleges and universities during the last few years — over 300 urban studies centers; the proliferation of urban affairs departments and, increasingly, entire schools devoted to preparing students for a wide range of urban occupations — the Foundation's involvement was modest and highly specialized. But we went into the urban-university business very early and probably on a larger scale than any other single funding source. For these reasons, it may be worthwhile to review the Foundation's experience and some of the lessons learned from it, and to speculate a bit about the future. Since the Foundation has not yet fully evaluated the results of this major granting effort, the report that follows will be impressionistic. It is based on personal experience, conversations with my colleagues, and the voluminous files that have accumulated on the Foundation's urban studies grants.

Two Concerns, Two Goals

The Foundation's support of universities' involvement with cities grew out of a long-term Foundation concern with both higher education and the problems of cities. We felt — and here I speak primarily of the 1960s — that universities were paying scandalously little attention to what was going on in American cities; that they had resources for teaching and research that, if directed toward urban ills, could make a real difference; and that if university faculty and students could be brought more closely into contact with the people and organizations trying to do something about city

problems, the accelerating deterioration of urban areas might be slowed. This view possessed some novelty in 1959 when the Foundation first seriously entered the urban field. But within a decade, the pressures of students, community groups, often of city government itself, to link the university more closely to the city had become irresistible for all but a few colleges and universities.

The Foundation's efforts had two main objectives and took place in two distinct time periods. The objectives were 1) to promote research on a wide range of urban problems by scholars from a variety of disciplines and 2) to encourage closer contact between university scholars and city decision-makers in order that research results could be directly applied to the ills of the city. The Foundation's emphasis thus has been on only two parts of the trinity of higher education, namely, research and service. We therefore have contributed very little to the teaching function of universities in this field and have played a negligible role in supporting new urban studies curricula or experimentation with new types of degrees. One exception was a grant to Morgan State College, matched by funds from the State of Maryland, that helped to launch Morgan's urban affairs curriculum, which currently appears to be going extraordinarily well.

Urban Extension

Although the Foundation made an occasional grant to support studies of physical planning or city government structure during the 1950s, we first seriously entered the field at the end of the decade, when we began funding a series of experiments that have come to be known as Urban Extension.* With grants totaling about $4.5 million, a number of state universities — Rutgers, Delaware, Wisconsin, Purdue, Illinois, Missouri, Berkeley, and Oklahoma — were encouraged to emulate the experience of the nineteenth century with agricultural extension agents. The idea was that if the university could train urban extension agents to work in cities, where they would bring to urban concerns the same kind of assistance that county agents brought to farmers, the fruits of academic research might be put to practical use to help ease the city's growing difficulties.

*For a detailed account of these experiments, see "Urban Extension," a Foundation report published in 1966. Copies available from the Ford Foundation, Office of Reports, 320 East 43 Street, New York, N.Y. 10017.

The urban extension experiment of the 1960s had mixed results. In a couple of cases — those that were well funded, had capable leadership, and were located in cities of moderate size with moderate difficulties — the experiments seemed to work well. The extension agents were well received, were listened to, and left a lasting imprint on the urban scene, particularly among the ghetto communities in which they operated. And their impact appears to have persisted — witness the Division of Urban Affairs at the University of Delaware and the Center for Urban Policy Research at Rutgers. In other cases, the experiments never really got off the ground, and today there is scarcely a trace of the Ford Foundation effort. It is also true that the urban extension idea has not swept the country, nor has it attracted the kind of university commitment and government funding that many of its adherents hoped it would.

The idea was undoubtedly oversold, thus generating unrealistic expectations. But the reasons for urban extension's uneven success lie deeper. They are rooted in basic differences between agricultural extension and urban extension. Perhaps the most significant contrast is the disproportion between the job to be done and the resources available for doing it. Well funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and generous state legislatures, each state's farm extension service commanded sufficient high quality staff, who received adequate support for publications and staff services. In addition, its mission was clear — to enhance the

productivity of American agriculture by disseminating the fruits of a solid research system; its target was obvious — the farmer and his family; and its accomplishments were measureable.

Now consider the dramatically different situation facing the proponents of urban extension. The charge to the urban agent was ambiguous and complex — somehow to tackle the problems of the city. It was never clear what the target was (certainly not the inner-city family), and the indicators of success were not even specified, let alone measured. The agent's resources also were miniscule when stacked up against the job. By that I mean not only financial support, but more fundamentally, urban research. There was a pitifully small amount of it in 1960 and it provided precious little understanding of the problems the agent faced or guidance as to what to do about them. In a sense, urban extension was at least a decade ahead of its time and imposed a virtually impossible task on its participants.

Emphasis on Economics

At about the same time — the late 1950s — the Foundation launched a different kind of program that was destined to help fill some of the gaps in knowledge that so plagued the urban agents later on. Beginning in 1959, an eight-year effort was begun to turn the attention of the economics profession toward the city. Administered by Resources for the Future's Committee on Urban Economics, the program spent about $1.25 million trying to encourage the economics profession to pay attention to what was happening in the nation's cities. Through the eight years of its life, the Committee on Urban Economics produced about forty Ph.D.s, helped to establish half a dozen research centers, and promoted a number of research projects in what was, at the time, virtually an unknown field. The money was well spent. Today, most graduate programs in economics offer urban and regional economics courses. In the biggest universities Ph.D. degrees with this specialization are both available and popular, and although we have a long way to go before we really understand the economic dynamics of the city, a start has been made. By almost any measure — the number of courses offered, Ph.D. dissertations written, journal articles and books published or in preparation — the field is here to stay.

An ambitious but more localized research program supported by the Foundation during the same period was the Joint Center for Urban Studies in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Over $2.5 million was made available to scholars at Harvard and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology through the Joint Center. Leadership roles there were taken by some of the luminaries of urban studies during the 1960s — Martin Meyerson, James Wilson, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, and Robert Wood. A series of solid studies of urban planning and politics came out under the imprint of the center during this period. Two notes of caution should be sounded about this model, however. It is not clear that the involvement of two prestigious universities added a new dimension to either the direct output of the center or the field of urbanism in general. Secondly, despite the urgency of urban problems in that period, Harvard and MIT evidently felt that other activities had a prior claim on their resources, and when Ford support ended in the late sixties the center entered a period of dormancy. Recently, however, under the leadership of Professor Bernard J. Frieden, the Joint Center has found new vitality and a new urban research mission.

Response to Crisis: Research and Service

The second wave of Ford grants came in the late sixties and early seventies and were made to a new generation of university urban specialists. In the last five years approximately $30 million has been granted to some dozen universities to help them hook into the urban scene. The biggest, $10 million, went to Colum-

bia, with Harvard, MIT, and Chicago not far behind. Princeton, Berkeley, Northwestern, Johns Hopkins, Miami, Vanderbilt, Yale, Cornell, Rice, and the University of Houston also received smaller amounts.

With this round of grants the atmosphere and surrounding circumstances were radically different. The "urban crisis" had begun in earnest. Watts had burned, Washington, D.C.'s Seventh Street was in shambles, and, according to many, the only thing that kept Harlem from exploding was the diversion provided by the championship play of the New York Mets.

In reflecting on these events and asking what a large Foundation might do, our officers and trustees were struck by how little the universities were contributing to an understanding of what was happening, by the fact that very few scholars had detected any early warning signs that the summers were going to be that hot, and that far from a meliorating role, the universities in many cases were either targets of the rioters or contributing directly to the widespread turmoil.

Something was clearly wrong. In the rhetoric of that time, the universities needed to be turned around — to focus their energies on the cities in which they were located, to apply their analytical capacities to understanding the agony of America's urban areas, to prepare students to rebuild and govern the cities, and to make the university's boundless intellectual resources available in the service of urban reform. Accordingly, Ford money once again began to flow to the universities in the cause of urban involvement. The same two themes ran through these grants — the need for more and better research on cities and the desirability of university faculty and students serving city governments.

Although the returns are far from complete, it is only fair to say that we achieved less than we had hoped. I need not dwell at length on the research component. It is fairly well known that universities have a marvelous capacity for

absorbing research funds. With Foundation money, Harvard, MIT, Columbia, and Chicago endowed about a dozen professorships and began scrambling for the half dozen or so top urban scholars whose work and orientation qualified them for these new slots. At these and other schools a wide variety of more specific research projects also were funded with Ford money. It is still too early to assess the output from this multimillion-dollar research expenditure. It is probably true that the existence of the endowed chairs encouraged several scholars to concentrate their efforts more intensively on urban problems than otherwise would have been the case. In addition, the funds assisted a substantial number of graduate students to do dissertations on urban projects, and the usual flow of journal articles and books can be identified. I am not, however, aware of any startling breakthroughs produced in our understanding of how cities operate, what makes them grow or wither, what produces conflict or harmony, and what the keys are to successful government, citizen participation, and efficient delivery of services.

One difficulty the urban researcher faced was coming to terms with a useful definition of what "urban studies" or "urban research" embraced. The question must be faced: What is urbanism as a field of study? It may not be just stubbornness and shortsightedness that lie behind the resistance of scholars from the traditional disciplines to participating in programs of urban studies or conducting "urban" research. I think they are questioning whether there really is any meaning to the term "urban studies," whether it can in any sense be considered a field parallel with the traditional social science disciplines. Many also have trouble attaching much meaning to such disciplinary branches as urban economics, urban politics, urban sociology, and so on. Another source of difficulty, of course, is the very complexity of the city itself and the rate at which it changes — factors that make the study of

urban phenomena incredibly difficult. We still know depressingly little about the dynamics of urban change, nor has research produced many conclusions that are useful to mayors, councilmen, and national urban policy makers.

The picture is even grimmer when we look at universities' efforts to be of direct service to governmental and private decision makers, although hopes were high for some success stories there. Numerous faculty members felt that if they could only get closer to the centers of power, they could begin to straighten things out; students demanded a deeper involvement with the poor and the black; and mayors, desperate for answers, eagerly welcomed the offer of help from centers of learning. But it didn't take long for disillusionment to set in. Mayors quickly discovered that professors' answers, if not irrelevant, were only partial. Students found that their offers of help were frequently unwelcome, and where they could break into the system, found the problems so intractable that the result was utter frustration. And professors emerged with either a new humility about city problems and respect for those holding power or the conviction that the mayor's perception of his problems was just misguided. Rather than supplying useful answers, the scholar often told city officials they were asking the wrong questions — which of course meant questions the professors didn't know how to answer. I would guess that although there have been several mutually satisfying tie-ins between academics and officeholders, the failures outnumber the successes by at least ten to one. It remains questionable whether any progress has been made toward developing productive working relations between university people and urban leaders.

Looking Back

What can be said about this disappointing performance? First of all, the late 1960s were years of extraordinary turbulence on American campuses. The universities not only shared much of the unrest afflicting the cities, but also had serious internal problems growing out of students' demands. And that unrest was compounded by an unprecedented financial crunch. The mortality rate of university presidents was higher than it had ever been before, and to many observers the very future of higher education in the United States seemed to be at stake. It was no time to take on major new research, education, and service responsibilities. Columbia University, for instance, during the years of Foundation support for its urban program, had three presidents. Little wonder that developing a coherent and integrated urban thrust proved to be impossible and that in the summer of 1973 *The New York Times* carried an obituary notice for Columbia's Urban Center.

Secondly, and more fundamentally, both the Ford Foundation and the universities it supported clearly bit off more than they could chew. The pressures of what was happening in the outside world gave everyone involved a sense of desperate urgency that inflated expectation and discouraged the kind of thoughtful planning that an undertaking of that scale and significance requires. Both the Foundation and the universities exaggerated their capabilities and underestimated the obstacles they would encounter. Some disappointment was inevitable. But more positively, the effort was made, and a great deal was learned about the issues. It therefore may be useful to try to reconstruct some of these lessons and to try to draw out of this experience some conclusions for the future.

I can do so without the usual caution that a foundation person must bring to public utterances because the one thing that can be said for certain is that the Ford Foundation has had its day with these kinds of urban involvement. The Foundation's substantial previous investment combined with shrinking budgets projected for the next few years leave no room

in the foreseeable future for a third major urban thrust.

Looking Forward

Despite the checkered history of the university-city connection, I emphatically reject the idea that universities should withdraw from urban involvement. The underlying needs of universities and cities will dictate continued experimentation and innovation. Although the last few summers have been comparatively quiet, only the foolhardy would argue that we have come to grips with the problems of the central city — housing, jobs, crime, the environment, and responsive government, to mention the most widely recognized. And it's not only the central city that will have to contend with these ills. As suburbs grow older and their economic functions continue to change, they, too, will have to face up to a similar set of problems.

Particularly critical will be the staffing of city government. The pressures for decentralizing decision-making and spending have been building for years, and almost certainly there will be an expansion of city government functions and a widening range of services that municipal governments will be called on to deliver. Public employment at the state and local levels is not likely to be dethroned as the fastest growing major job sector in the U.S. economy.

Thus university-urban involvement is necessary. The cities need well-trained graduates, good research, and the services of university people. Nevertheless, I question whether universities have the talents and specialized resources to contribute over as wide a front as was attempted during the past decade. Colleges and universities, at their best, do a good job of educating students and of producing research. They are not distinguished for making political decisions nor do they perform very well in the arena of social and economic reform. The professor is right when he says the mayor is asking the wrong questions — at least they

are wrong for him. Therefore no one should be surprised that the answers he gives are ignored. It is the rare scholar who is respected both by his academic colleagues and the decision-maker he advises. In this context, I can do no better than quote from that wise young man, Aaron Wildavsky, as he writes in the preface to his recent book about the Oakland Project of the University of California:

> The "University" is an abstraction, and as such it exists only for direct educational functions, not for the purpose of doing work within cities. Yet there are faculty members and students who are willing to devote large portions of their time and energy to investigating urban problems and to making small contributions toward resolving them. Our cities, however, do not need an invasion of unskilled students and professors. There is no point in hurtling into the urban crisis unless one has some special talent to contribute. After all, there are many people in city government — and even more on street corners — who are less inept than untrained academics. University people must offer the cities the talent and resources which they need and which they could not get otherwise.*

One more word of caution. I doubt that setting up an urban studies center will very often be the answer, though clearly this is the course that scores of colleges and universities have followed in the last few years. Those of us who have lived through the birth and early childhood years of new urban centers can only say "amen" to John Bebout's observation: "We all know that too many so-called urban centers have been created on paper, with at best a skeleton staff and a license to prey upon public and private funding agencies for grants and contracts."** The urban center is unlikely to be more than just another paper organization unless it has two essential ingredients: hard funding and good leadership. The days of easy grants to monitor or evaluate Model Cities programs and OEO activities, or to spend Section 701 HUD money or Title I Office of Education

*Jeffrey L. Pressmen, and Aaron Wildavsky. *Implementation. How Great Expectations in Washington Are Dashed in Oakland.* University of California Press, 1973.

**John Bebout, "Urban studies: Higher education and the urban community," *Urban Education.* April 1971.

money are either behind us or rapidly coming to an end. The resulting vacuum will have to be filled either by money directly out of the university budget or new appropriations from the federal government or the states. Assuring continuation of an urban program at private universities has proved to be a particularly chancy thing; few have responded with the generosity of a Northwestern or a Johns Hopkins to assure that the urban thrust will not disappear.

It seems to me, too, that directing an urban center is not a one-third-time job for an unproductive associate professor. It takes someone who knows something about cities, who is committed to the mission of the center, and who is permitted to devote enough time to this task so that it is his or her primary academic responsibility. It is a far more demanding job than either teaching or research, and administrators would do well to recognize that at the outset.

Implications for the University

Let me turn now to some implications of a school's urban involvement for the traditional functions of teaching, research, and service.

By and large it will be the present generation of students who hold the key to the future of urban America. It is heartening to realize that increasing numbers of bright university graduates are finally recognizing that public service at the city level can be a rewarding and satisfying career. A challenge to the university is to see that this trend continues, and that the people it turns loose for public service are able to cope with the demands placed on them. Particularly challenging is the responsibility placed on teachers of tomorrow's Black, Chicano, and other minority-group urban leaders. Tom Bradley, Coleman Young, and Maynard Jackson are but the most visible representatives of a new force in this country's city politics; they will be followed by thousands more as minority politicians, administrators, and managers move into every level of local government.

I wish I knew the secret of how to prepare the public servants and civic leaders who will govern, manage, plan, design, and live in tomorrow's cities, but I don't. I only know there are no easy answers. I believe, however, that institutions of higher education do a great disservice to students and to cities if their urban curriculum merely exposes students to city government, to community action, and to the techniques and politics of advocacy. What the cities need and what universities can give is understanding — understanding of the urban economy, of the movement of people in and out of cities, of the public finances of cities and suburbs, of the politics of ethnic and racial groups, and of the skills needed to move bureaucracies, deal with labor unions, and manage governmental enterprises. Practical experience can contribute to such expertise, but a heavy dose of good classroom teaching is also necessary. Thus I would be skeptical of the curriculum that substitutes internship for theoretical training, that encourages involvement with the community at the expense of rigorous analysis, or that gives casual impressions the same weight as hard data.

With regard to research, I find myself on the side of those who feel that all of our eggs should not be put into the urban studies basket. Put another way, the best research on urban problems is likely to be done by the good economist, the good political scientist, the good sociologist, the good legal scholar, or the good engineer who brings to his quest for understanding a tested body of theory and a sound statistical methodology. I would add, however, that although I do not hold high the banner of interdisciplinary research, each of these disciplines needs at a very minimum to communicate regularly with people in other disciplines who are looking at the elephant from different but nonetheless real perspectives.

The service responsibilities of colleges and universities usually grow out of their research activities, and on this subject, let me quote from a perceptive article written by Leonard Duhl some six years ago. He says:

> Just as the basic researcher in medicine cannot be expected to treat the specific ailments of the patient, so the urban researcher is ill equipped to treat the specific problems of the city. For that, we need people who are trained in *applying* urban research — people who understand the kinds of obstacles that anyone trying to achieve change in an institution, organization, or government has to face.*

I would emphasize the two sides to that prescription: He must be himself a good researcher or at least understand the difference between good research and bad, but he must also be comfortable with the untidy reality of urban problems. In addition, he needs a talent, all too rare, for translating research findings into concepts and language that are comprehensible to someone who doesn't have a Ph.D. Few skills seem to be as undervalued by research scholars as the ability to communicate with the layman. Unfortunately, the number of people with that skill on university faculties is very small, and there are few incentives for those who do have it to put it at the service of urban improvement. Promotions are still highly correlated with applause from one's academic colleagues, and salaries seldom reflect the wisdom of one's advice to the local police chief. A former academic colleague of mine is spending this year trying to overcome his own deficiencies on this score. Recognizing that his Ph.D. in local public finance economics taught him little about how cities really work, he has attached himself to the manager of Tacoma, Washington, as economist in residence. Any professor who plans to put his discipline at the service of urban problems would benefit from such an "apprenticeship."

Finally, I'd like to repeat that colleges and universities have much to gain and much to give through their urban involvement. But there are many booby traps along the way. Fortunately many of the pressures for immediate action and for ill-conceived social programs have disappeared. Universities may plan more carefully and move more deliberately than was possible half a dozen years ago. They also can benefit from the mistakes of their predecessors. My advice is simple — universities should encourage students and faculty to turn their attention to the problems of the city, but insist that they be attacked with the weapons scholars are most adept at using — wide-ranging curiosity and disciplined intelligence.

*Leonard J. Duhl and Antonia H. Chayes, "Can academia help the cities?" *Trans-Action*, May 1968.

Ford Foundation Urban Studies Grants
1959-1974

Research and Training in Urban Economics	
Resources for the Future	1,275,000
Urban Centers and Urban Studies Programs	
Joint Center for Urban Studies (Harvard-MIT)	2,675,000
Columbia University	10,000,000
Massachusetts Institute of Technology	4,500,000
Princeton University	650,000
Morgan State College	565,000
Harvard University	3,800,000
University of Chicago	5,250,000
Johns Hopkins University	500,000
Northwestern University	700,000
Yale University	350,000
Vanderbilt University	350,000
University of Miami	300,000
Southwest Center for Urban Research (Houston-Rice-Texas Southern)	650,000
Cornell University	250,000
	30,540,000

Urban Extension

ACTION Housing, Pittsburgh	$ 513,000
University of California (Berkeley)	250,000
University of Delaware	775,000
University of Illinois	125,000
University of Missouri	70,000
University of Oklahoma	130,000
Purdue University	180,000
Rutgers University	1,050,000
University of Wisconsin	1,240,000
	4,333,000
Total	$36,148,000

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